

Shaffer Is Champion of Long-Term Care

For Penny Shaffer, program director, Health and Human Services for the JCCC Center for Business and Technology, there is no

separation between her vocation as a nurse with a specialty in geriatric psychiatry and her avocation as an artist.

“They are both part of who I am,” Shaffer said.

Shaffer came to the Center for Business and Technology in July 2006 after serving as the first director of education for the Geriatric Education, Research & Training Institute in Johnson County and establishing a number of inpatient geropsychiatry programs for hospitals and long-term care centers in Greater Kansas City and for the Menninger Clinic.

During Shaffer’s one-and-a-half years at JCCC, she has increased the number of HHS certificates from two to nine; increased the number of continuing education seminars by 30 percent; and organized the first Alzheimer’s Research Forum, which was cosponsored by the Alzheimer’s Association, at JCCC in fall 2007, and a Parkinson’s symposium for health care workers, patients with Parkinson’s disease and their caregivers in April 2008. Her goal is a major symposium each semester.

Shaffer is also taking continued education to health care facilities so that employees give up minimal patient-care time. She presented four lectures on topics such as dementia, difficult behavior, depression and the effect of psychotropic medications on the elderly at John Knox Village, Lee’s Summit, Mo., in 2007, and plans for other professionals to present at additional sites. As of this writing, Shaffer has a large grant pending with the Department of Labor, Department of Commerce and Workforce Investment Act to improve the quality of education for workers in long-term care.

While Shaffer has a nursing degree from JCCC, a bachelor’s degree in psychology from MidAmerica Nazarene University and a master’s degree in human resources from Webster University, she is just four credit hours short of a bachelor’s degree in fine arts. Her paintings of birds in their natural habitat hang in her Regnier Center office. Shaffer has taken classes in most media – pottery, silversmithing, photography and painting. While she hasn’t had time to paint recently (she works in watercolor and gouache), she still sculpts in




clay and shoots digital photographs.

Shaffer’s art and advocacy of improved long-term health care for the elderly are intertwined.

“The artistic side of anybody looks at new, creative ways to combine things,” Shaffer said. “To change the model of long-term care, we need to think outside the box. Right now nursing home care is structured on a linear schedule of time and place. We need to change thinking so that care is resident-centered.”

Shaffer has used her art to connect with residents in nursing homes. She asked residents with dementia to describe memories of a childhood home, which she drew on a whiteboard.

“I have used my art to validate people’s memories, spirit and persona and, in turn, learned some wonderful things about residents,” Shaffer said. “Just because people with dementia don’t know the day, year or the name of the president, doesn’t mean they can’t talk about relationships and spirituality. The essence of their personhood is not gone.”

Shaffer is a passionate champion of the elderly and improved aging services. For her, the best way to make a difference is through education – a way to open minds and teach people different ways of approaching long-term care, especially for the elderly with dementia. 

Staff

Penny Shaffer, program director, Health and Human Services, is seen here with some of her paintings.